



State of South Carolina

Office of the Governor

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June 14, 2007

The Honorable Robert W. Harrell, Jr.
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Post Office Box 11867
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Dear Mr. Speaker and Members of the House:

I am hereby vetoing and returning without my approval H. 3045, R-124.

This bill establishes a firefighter grants program that would award grants to volunteer and combination fire departments. The grants would be administered by the State Fire Marshal in conjunction with a peer review council.

I admire the intent of those who have worked on this legislation so much that this bill was one of the two most difficult bills this year for me and this administration on which to reach resolution. I narrowly came down on the side of the veto, not because of its proponents in the firefighting community's intent nor because of the caliber of leadership currently at place in those same circles. In fact, I've grown to personally admire their commitment, not only to firefighting, but to making a difference in people's lives here in South Carolina. I also struggled with this legislation because of the very real sacrifices and personal commitment of thousands of volunteer and paid firefighters across the state.

I cannot say enough good things about the competitive process that was created in this legislation. It falls in stark contrast to many of the non-competitive and highly political processes that now befall spending programs in Columbia. Doing what has been proposed here is crucial to get right the distribution of scarce resources in our state.

Additionally, I think this legislation worked to close some of the gaps that exist between big and small fire services because of the discrepancies in what big services have available to them. In this light, it also closes gaps between rural and urban South Carolina that see the same funding gaps. Finally, these grants would have worked to complement a great area of volunteerism that is alive and well in our state in the volunteer fire departments. Uplifting and supporting people who

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give of their time to help others is important to the fabric of our state and the quality of life afforded in South Carolina.

So ultimately I came down on the side of vetoing this bill not because of its merits, but simply because I believe that if there was ever a year not to be adding a new governmental program, this year is it. In Wednesday's Wall Street Journal, there was an article entitled, "Do Georgia's Small Builders Signal a Dangerous Trend?" It went on to recount how construction loan delinquencies and building foreclosures seem to be spreading beyond the arguably overbuilt markets of Florida, Arizona or California. It fits with other things that I have read that seem to suggest the national economy is on its way toward cooling. If my hunch is correct here, I do not think we would want to start and then stop with programs as important as firefighting and its insurance are to people's lives.

Waiting, in this instance, would allow proponents of this legislation to cure the one component I did find lacking - no local match. Government often spends much more than it should because seemingly every need is every government's job - rather than specific needs being assigned to different areas or levels of government. It has been this administration's view that services like water and sewer, or police or fire protection, are fundamentally tied to local areas of government rather than federal or state government. Admittedly, September 11th has blurred and changed many of these lines, but the basic truth still holds that we should not look to Washington for the administration of local garbage pick-up or police protection. Accordingly, we believe a local match is important in further vesting a local community in spending decisions.

Without a local match, the misperception of "free money" often takes hold, and what we have seen in the so-called Competitive Grants program is that the availability of "free money" unleashes a demand that otherwise does not exist. Since the creation of the Competitive Grants Program, which has no local match requirement, there have been over 2,200 applications with requests exceeding \$350 million - more than **five times total funding available** over the same time. In any taxpayer-funded grant program, I believe there should be some local commitment of funds to avoid this type of phenomenon.

Again, I applaud the sponsors of this legislation for working carefully to put protections in place for the taxpayers and to depoliticize this program. However, for the reasons described, I am, unfortunately, compelled to veto this legislation.

Sincerely,



Mark Sanford